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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 6302

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000236

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPARTMENT OF NEA/ARPI,
NEA/IPA; PARIS FOR ZEYA; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2015

TAGS: ETTC IS KBCT KISL KPAL PREL SA

SUBJECT: OIC DISMISSES RECENT BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL MEETING AS
ROUTINE

REF: A. E-MAILS: MILLS/CHOVAN 3-8-06

1B. MILLS/CHOVAN 3-25-06

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller, for reasons
1.4 9b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY; The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) insisted in a March 25 meeting with Consulate staff that the recent session of the Israel Boycott Office was a routine annual event, sponsored solely by the OIC and that no significant recommendations resulted. No list of representatives or minutes of the meeting have been released.

OIC officials agreed to present the Consulate's ongoing request for information concerning the meeting to the OIC Secretary General. In regards to Palestinian affairs, the

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Palestinian Ambassador to OIC stated that HAMAS would be able to take the reins of government, although it may not be readily accepted by some foreign powers. He also expressed the hope that the realities of governing will moderate HAMAS policies. The Ambassador emphasized that Palestinian hopes for peace have been consistently frustrated, frequently as a result of Israeli actions, and pleaded for U.S. and Quartet pressure on Israel, before the Palestinian population loses faith in the Abbas government.

BACKGROUND: OIC BOYCOTT OFFICE MEETING

¶2. (C) Between March 13-14, 2006 the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held the Ninth Meeting of the Liaison Officers of Islamic Regional Offices for the Boycott of Israel in Jeddah. In a preliminary telephone contact on March 8, Ambassador Salem el-Honi, Director of the Islamic boycott Office of the OIC, assured Pol/Econ Chief that the meeting was a routine, yearly meeting of the Committee in compliance with a directive of the Council of Ministers Meeting of the OIC dating to 1996. He stated several times that the meeting was not sponsored by Saudi Arabia. It was being held in Jeddah only because it is the site of the OIC headquarters. Prior to the meeting, Ambassador el-Honi refused to say who would or would not send representatives to the Conference, or if minutes or recommendations of the meeting would be available to the public.

NO INFORMATION SUPPLIED AFTER THE MEETING

¶3. (C) News of this meeting aroused media attention and raised Congressional concern about Saudi Arabia's commitment to its obligations under the WTO. Consulate General Jeddah was requested to contact OIC officials and confirm sponsorship and determine participation in the meeting, its agenda, and decisions or recommendations emanating from the meeting (refs). Subsequent attempts to contact Ambassador el-Honi concerning the Conference were unavailing. Consulate was ultimately informed that Ambassador el-Honi went on leave after the conclusion of the meeting. (Note: He apparently left immediately after the end of the meeting, because repeated inquiries on the afternoon of the last day of the conference and the following day were all rebuffed with the rely that the Ambassador was not in his office. End note.) Efforts by staff of Consulate General Public Diplomacy Section to obtain information from the Press Office of the OIC were similarly unsuccessful. In response to repeated requests, OIC finally agreed to a meeting between Jeddah Pol/Econ officers and OIC officials on Saturday March 25.

OIC OFFICIALS, BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¶4. (C) On the morning of March 25, Jeddah Pol/Econ Chief and Congenoff met with Ambassador Samir Baker, Assistant Secretary General Director of Coordinator with Palestine

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(sic). Ambassador Baker assumed this post approximately 2 months ago, after serving for 21 years as Palestinian representative in Nigeria. Also present was Yahaya Lawal, Director of Political Affairs, OIC. Mr. Lawal is a Nigerian diplomat from Kano. He has held his position for more than a year and expects to serve at the OIC for several more years. The two men spoke excellent English, were very cordial and expressed a willingness to maintain contacts with the Consulate in the future.

BOYCOTT MEETING ROUTINE AND UNEVENTFUL

JEDDAH 00000236 002 OF 003

¶5. (C) Baker stated that he did not participate in the Boycott Office meetings. Not being present, he claimed to be unable to say who had actually attended the meeting, what the agenda had been or summarize the results. However, repeating what Ambassador el-Honi had said earlier, Baker stated several times that the meeting of the OIC Israel Boycott commission was simply a routine, OIC-managed, annual session affirming the OIC's stance toward Israel. He emphasized that there was nothing unusual about the event and that it simply confirmed previous resolutions that were adopted by the OIC at a 1996 ministerial conference. He said that 20 OIC member countries, as well as the Arab League, were represented on the Boycott Committee, but he professed to be unable to say what countries attended the recent meeting. Nevertheless, he felt capable of assuring Conoff that no new initiatives were passed by the Committee.

BOYCOTT OFFICE COMMITTED TO PEACE PROCESS

¶6. (C) He continued by stating that the Boycot Office tied this year's annual meeting to the peace process. Baker specifically mentioned continuing OIC support for the Saudi initiative agreed to in Beirut in 2002 that promised Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for a complete withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders. Baker said: "No new positions were taken. Though some Arab countries have relations with Israel, we link this issue to the complete resolution of the Middle East problem. Either the full implementation of the "Road Map" or the Israeli withdrawal from the areas occupied in 1967. If this is achieved, we will review this (the boycott)."

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION TO BE FORWARDED TO OIC SECRETARY GENERAL

¶7. (C) Conoffs cautioned the Ambassador that some members of Congress were concerned by news reports about this event, and that providing complete and timely information on what had transpired could prevent misunderstandings in Congress. Conoffs requested a list of attendees, the meeting agenda and a record of statements or decisions made by the Committee. Ambassador Baker said he would speak to the Secretary General and to Ambassador el-Honi to see if they could provide the requested information. Subsequently, the Consulate General added a request for a list of the standing members of the Boycott Committee.

PALESTINIAN DISENCHANTMENT FOLLOWING OSLO

¶8. (C) Ambassador Baker also discussed the situation in the Palestinian Territories since the death of Yasser Arafat. On the subject of HAMAS' recent victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, Baker, undoubtedly a Fatah stalwart given his long tenure as a Palestinian envoy, said: "HAMAS will not have a problem organizing the internal affairs of the Palestinian people. We have to respect the decision of the Palestinian people." He noted that problems may arise involving the new HAMAS government's external relations, i.e. with the West. Baker believed that President Mahmoud Abbas could serve as a bridge between the Palestinian Authority (including the HAMAS government) and other parties. "We hope that HAMAS will realize now that they are in power, that they cannot take the same extreme positions as when they were in the opposition," said Baker. "Hopefully, they can be more realistic."

¶9. (C) Baker noted that though the Palestinians were promised a state within five years of the Oslo Accords, this never developed, a fact he attributed, at least in part, to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin. He linked the second Intifada to the Palestinian's perception of a lack of subsequent progress in the peace process. He added that President Bush's "Road Map" calling for a Palestinian state briefly infused the situation with a measure of hope, but that this initiative was not implemented according to the original timetable, leading to the present situation. Baker said that Israel's ongoing construction of the security wall had isolated the West Bank and East Jerusalem and deprived the Palestinians of vital water resources. These moves, combined with continuing Israeli attacks on civilians, have

JEDDAH 00000236 003 OF 003

convinced Palestinians that Israelis are not serious about peace. In contrast to Israel's obstructionism, he noted that: "Even HAMAS stopped attacks both before and after the elections. This (situation) needs the intervention of the U.S. in particular and the Quartet to ensure peace. This should be done after the Israeli elections." Baker stressed that Abbas' credibility with the Palestinian public would only last as long as he can deliver on his "promises."
Gfoeller